

Julian Carr, a Salt Lake City local, makes the most of Alta's powder
PHOTO ADAM CLARK

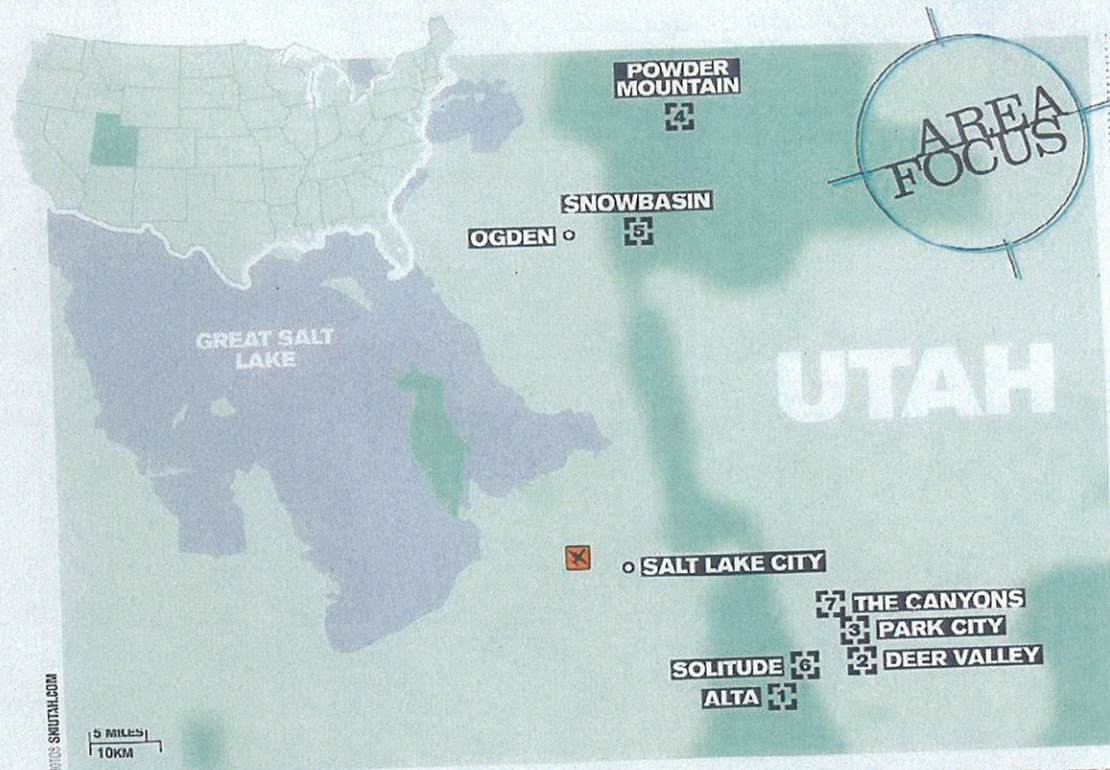
THE GREATEST SNOW ON Earth?

Known the world over as the Mormon state, there is another, lesser known, religious aspect to **Utah** in North America – its heavenly powder, which is obviously of more interest to the discerning Fall-Line reader. Can it really be that good? Well, it's certainly blessed with a phenomenal weather pattern

WORDS **PATRICK THORNE AND RACHEL DEVLIN**

THE STATE OF UTAH sits nestled in the Rocky Mountains, which makes for a unique weather system that brings much-coveted snow conditions to the area. The clouds that have drunk deeply from the Pacific Ocean on the west coast then travel inland and across the western deserts, where the dry, arid region cooks the Pacific moisture right back out again. Then, when these clouds hit the Rockies, temperatures cool rapidly, precipitation (that's snow to you and me) begins, and the snow that falls is perfection itself – super light, dry and fluffy... and lots of it. But wait, in the style of Jimmy Cricket, there's more... good news, that is! Utah has 14 mountain resorts and seven crosscountry ski areas, and they are so easy to get to from Salt Lake International airport that you can sample a few of them during one

holiday. Eleven of the 14 lie within an hour's drive of Salt Lake City and the other three are four hour's drive from Las Vegas airport. If it's reliable snow and top-class service that you're after then, as long as you can afford the transatlantic flight, you need to get yourself to Utah. We're also relieved to hear that, since 2009, they've relaxed their strict liquor rules, which meant you had to buy a membership to a pub to enjoy a beer after a day on the mountain. Sadly, a couple of the resort's here have not relaxed their anti-snowboarding ways. We're not really sure why in this day and age, but there are still plenty of one-plank-friendly spots to make you forget about the prejudice of a few. Read on for a run down on the main spots we'd recommend... then send us your jealousy-inspiring holiday snaps when you get back. ➤



1 ALTA

One of the very last ski-only resorts in the world, Alta is one of two tucked up the Little Cottonwood Canyon, along with Snowbird. It has two distinct histories – the first as a silver mining town, the other as a ski area. Silver was discovered in 1864 and Alta's population peaked just before the devaluation of silver in 1873.

Fast forward a mere 50 years – Alta was an early adopter – Alta Ski Area began with the construction of Collins, the first chairlift. Opened in 1939 they paid 25 cents a ride or \$1.50 for a full day pass. It's gone up a bit, but then there are a few more lifts...

THE MOUNTAIN

Although famous for its powder, Alta has terrain for everyone with 25% of its slopes aimed at beginners. The wide, gentle greens are located on Sunnyside and Albion, well away from the more advanced skiers. Sunnyside has a mile long beginners run known as the Crooked Mile. Above the beginner area skiers can ride the Sugarloaf triple chair which

There's powder to be found on terrain that everyone can ski



Steep pitch, open bowl – classic Alta in-bounds skiing territory

opens up tougher terrain.

Unloading at the top of Sugarloaf gives virtually 360 degrees of views. On the front side of Alta are the Wildcat, Collins (updated since the 20s) and Germania lifts. These feed into the top of the resort, where the real fun is to be had. Skiing Alta is all about tracking round the paths of the upper bowls and picking a fresh off piste in-bounds line every time. There's always a new way to ride each run, and that's what makes the place so compelling.

APRÈS

Fun off the slopes is generally self-contained within the lodges. In 2009 a new law came into effect changing Utah's bar scene. In the past, you had to buy a temporary

membership to get into a bar or club. The new law means bars, pubs and clubs now have an open door policy to welcome all comers over 21.

Alta's lodges provide inclusive dinner for their guests, but generally not for others. Exceptions include Rustler Lodge, Snowpine and the Shaft.

HOW TO GET THERE

The nearest international airport is Salt Lake City (25 miles away). Driving from the airport, take Interstate 215 southbound and exit at 6200 South (Exit No 6). Then follow the brown recreation signs to Alta in Little Cottonwood Canyon. There is also a public bus service from the airport and Salt Lake City into Alta.

ALTA IN NUMBERS

Bottom lift: 2599m
Top lift: 3215m
Vertical drop: 615
Total number of runs: 115
Blue runs: 25%
Red runs: 40%
Black runs: 35%
Longest run: 5.6km
Total lifts: 12
Total crosscountry: 15km
www.alta.com

2 DEER VALLEY

Deer Valley has carefully built a reputation for being dead flash, and it's well deserved. Pricey lift tickets are the first taste, followed by some very smart looking base station eateries. The finely turned out ski ambassadors, many of them ex-racers, add to the overall buttoned-up feel of the place. Where Alta and snowboarding don't really go together because of the tracks into the bowls, at Deer Valley snowboards are banned because the existing clientele like it that way. Once you head out to make a mess of the immaculate pistes, it's all you can do to stop turning around and smoothing your tracks...

THE MOUNTAIN

Deer Valley's skiing extends over four mountains. It includes a variety of trail levels, along with 10 chutes containing 45 to 60 degree pitches, as steep as anywhere in Utah.

There are easy, intermediate and advanced trails on every mountain. First time skiers have a separate, protected beginners' area known as Wide West, which is accessed by the Burns and Snowflake chairs on Bald Eagle Mountain, the first to be reached from Deer Valley's base and best suited to beginners and intermediates. A second mountain suited to beginners and intermediates is Flagstaff, although it also includes the resort's double-black diamond Ontario Bowl runs.

Most of Deer Valley's terrain will suit intermediate skiers, and the resort has two categories of intermediate level run. Normally graded 'blue square' in North America, Deer Valley offers 'double blue square' grading for some tougher intermediate trails. Bald Mountain contains mostly intermediate and advanced terrain, with Sunset the escape route for beginners who misread

Pristine powder is lying in wait everywhere you turn

Free tours are also staged twice daily for intermediate and advanced level skiers to explore what's on offer.

APRÈS

Deer Valley hasn't really got an après scene of its own to speak of, with most folk preferring to head into Park City. The resort's location is hardly just one mile from Park City's Main Street, where you'll find more than 100 restaurants, bars and clubs to eat, drink and embarrass yourself in.

Salt Lake City itself is also easy to reach for an evening. Regular attractions there include performances by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir (rehearsals are free and open to the public on Thursday evenings) and sporting events, such as games by the Utah Jazz basketball team.

HOW TO GET THERE

Deer Valley is 38 miles from Salt Lake International. The resort is linked to the airport by a regular shuttle bus, and Park City has a free city-wide bus shuttle service. This is one of the few North American resorts where you might consider not bothering with a rental car.

DEER VALLEY IN NUMBERS

Bottom lift: 2002m
Top lift: 2917m
Vertical drop: 915m
Total number of runs: 100
Blue runs: 27%
Red runs: 41%
Black runs: 32%
Longest run: 3.2km
Total lifts: 23
Total crosscountry: 0km
www.deervalley.com



Checking out Deer Valley

3 PARK CITY MOUNTAIN RESORT

Things are looking good at Park City Mountain Resort. First of all, many of the 2002 Salt Lake Winter Olympic events were staged there. Secondly, Mother Nature drops huge amounts of snow on the place every winter and, third, visitors only have to trek 64km from the airport at Salt Lake City to get to it.

For many years the biggest and, most would agree, the best resort in Utah, Park City's skiable terrain has recently increased to 3,300 acres. Given its increasing competition, Park City is happy to emphasise one way in particular in which it differs from other Utah resorts – its 'real' ski town status, developing, like Aspen, from an old 19th century silver mining town. Park City is also the base for neighbouring Deer Valley and The Canyons.

More than 300 historic buildings are located in the 'Old Town', amongst them a saloon owned by Robert Redford and, ironically, once robbed by the real Sundance Kid that Redford played on film. The resort grew out of the Treasure Mountain Ski Area, which opened with a gondola, a double chair and two surface tows on December 21, 1963.

THE MOUNTAIN

You'll find a nice mix of terrain at Park City Mountain Resort. Most areas on the mountain, except for the back bowl terrain, are open to skiers of all abilities due to the raft of long easy and intermediate runs on offer alongside the steepers. Options, you see, and plenty of them. Beginners have easy cruising runs like Home Run and Bonanza that still give them the chance to ski from top to bottom, while intermediates have most of the mountain at back and call. Then there's the expert-only Pinecone Ridge and Homelite, which you can access from the top of the Jupiter chairlift, followed by a short traverse and hike that's well worth the effort.

If you're visiting on a package holiday from outside America, there are various multi-area liftpasses available to you, the most useful takes in neighbouring Deer Valley and The Canyons. We like the free Black Diamond tours that always prove very popular with experts wanting some guiding down the narrow chutes, powder bowls and gladed areas. The tour route takes in Jupiter

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continued

peak, the bowls off Pinecone Ridge and the gladed terrain of McConkey's Bowl.

APRÈS

Things are a good bit livelier in this part of Utah and there are about 20 bars and clubs around Park City to have some fun of an evening. There are also a raft of really good spots, like Italian Ciserio's Ristorante and Night Club and Mulligan's Irish Pub and Restaurant.

HOW TO GET THERE

Park City is 32 miles from Salt Lake international airport via the all-weather Interstate 80 and highway 224.

The resort is linked to the airport by a regular shuttle bus, and as Park City itself has a free city-wide bus shuttle service itself that operates from various points in the resort every 20 minutes from 7am to 12.30am so you can say goodbye to the hire car.

PARK CITY MOUNTAIN RESORT IN NUMBERS

Bottom lift: 2103m
Top lift: 3047m
Vertical drop: 944m
Total number of runs: 107
Blue runs: 18%
Red runs: 44%
Black runs: 38%
Night skiing: Yes
Longest run: 5.1km
Total lifts: 16
Snowboard park: 1
Halfpipe: 1
Total crosscountry: 12km
→ www.parkcitymountain.com

4 POWDER MOUNTAIN

We like the numbers here: more than 5,500 acres inbounds and over 2,500 for Powder Snowcat Safari adds up to the most skiable



Heading for The Canyons' powdery gladed runs



Powder Mountain's got the most skiable terrain in the US

terrain in the US. So you won't be sharing any of the 124 runs with a crowd. Even better, there's no need for even one snow canon here, as snow god Ullr smiles on Powder Mountain every winter with more than 500 inches. This resort is best known for its untracked powder, but a large variety of runs are groomed nightly, too.

THE MOUNTAIN

There are complementary tours to join each day at 10am, and last about two hours, and help you get acquainted with what's on offer here. If it's the untracked stuff you're after, then we'd recommend

booking a guide for a day. The other option is Powder Snowcat Safari, excursions are limited to 10 guests and two guides per day. For the freestyle-orientated, the Hidden Lake Terrain Park is designed for experts and large, technical features line the entire length of the Hidden Lake Run.

Freeriders head to the top of the resort and then ski down to the access road. At this point the resort charabanc, a converted school bus with a giant external ski rack which trundles up and down all day, scoops you up and drops you back at the base station.

Make sure to check out the Lightning Ridge snowcat that will take you to the top of Lightning Ridge with no effort on your part. Once up there, you'll have access to more than 700 acres of pristine powder snow with an impressive 2100m vertical drop.

APRÈS

Head for Powder Keg, which has beer on tap and live music on weekends. It closes at 6pm, while Ogden Valley has Shooting Star, the oldest saloon in Utah, and Carlos and Harleys, a private club. Most restaurants in the area have liquor licences and turn-of-the-century 25th Street, in Ogden, is the entertainment district for the area.

HOW TO GET THERE

Powder Mountain sits 55 miles north of Salt Lake airport. There is a shuttle service and tickets can be bought on the resort's website.

POWDER MOUNTAIN IN NUMBERS

Bottom lift: 2103m
Top lift: 2712m
Vertical drop: 609m
Total number of runs: 124
Blue runs: 25%
Red runs: 40%
Black runs: 35%
Night skiing: Yes
Total lifts: 7
Snowboard Parks: 2
Halfpipes: 1
→ www.powdermountain.com

5 SNOWBASIN

Snowbasin, three miles away from Ogden where most people stay (and home to excellent railway gun museums, if you like that sort of thing), opened in the 40s developed at a gentle pace but clearly has some pretty decent vertical because it held the 2002 Winter Olympics Downhill and Super G events.

THE MOUNTAIN

With more than 100 designated runs, Snowbasin has got something for every ability. The runs are best for intermediates and the resort is serviced by 13 lifts, including two eight-passenger gondolas and a high speed detachable quad, giving access to 3200 skiable acres. Most of the resort offers intermediate groomers with some nice long trails and we'd recommend checking out the

downhill courses here. Powder hounds will like this mountain more than most and there's a variety of black slopes to keep experts interested, or head over to the Strawberry Express gondola for wide powder fields and access to the backcountry gates. Alternatively, head over to the other side of the resort to the freeriding haven around No Name and Allen's Peak. Freestylers are pretty well catered for too, though, and there are two decent terrain parks and a top-notch superpipe. Beginners should head for the pistes off the Becker chair.

APRÈS

Head for Huntsville or Ogden, which are the nearby towns, and have enough to keep you happy for a week.

HOW TO GET THERE

Snowbasin is situated in the Wasatch-Cache National Forest, 33 miles from Salt Lake City International Airport.

SNOWBASIN IN NUMBERS

Bottom lift: 1950m
Top lift: 2649m
Vertical drop: 889m
Total number of runs: 113
Blue runs: 12%
Red runs: 50%
Black runs: 38%
Longest run: 5km
Total lifts: 13
Snowboard parks: 2
Halfpipes: 1
Total crosscountry: 26km
→ www.snowbasin.com

6 SOLITUDE

From the beginning, Solitude has always been a homely, casual, easy-going sort of place and, although it has now grown into a major Utah resort with a wide variety of skiing and facilities to match, the friendly and unpretentious atmosphere is still very much in evidence.

THE MOUNTAIN

The season usually runs from early November through to late April with an average annual snowfall of 405 inches. There are 83 named runs and three bowls plus 400 acres of off-piste skiing in pristine Honeycomb Canyon. About one fifth of the runs are for beginners, while half the mountain is suitable for intermediates and the rest is a playground for experts. The resort also operates a joint Solbright

ticket with neighbouring ski area, Brighton, and it is possible to ski between the two. Solitude is the only Utah resort which caters for both alpine and crosscountry skiers with 20km of prepared nordic trails - the Solitude Nordic Centre, located 1.5 miles (2km) above the main old area, is a full-service area offering cross-country rentals and lessons.

APRÈS

The Main Lodge at Entry No 2 houses the Solitude Club and the Thirsty Squirrel. There's locally brewed beer, wine, mixed drinks and comfortable surroundings and is the gathering place for the Yurt and Roundhouse dining departures. The Thirsty Squirrel is where local skiers gather and reflect on the day's powder skiing.

HOW TO GET THERE

Solitude is 25 miles from Salt Lake City. To get there from downtown or the airport, take I-80 East to I-215 South. Take Exit 6 and follow the signs to Solitude. The Utah Transit Authority operates daily ski bus service from downtown Salt Lake City and other locations in the valley.

SOLITUDE IN NUMBERS

Bottom lift: 2438m
Top lift: 3057m
Vertical drop: 624m
Total number of runs: 61
Blue runs: 20%
Red runs: 50%
Black runs: 30%
Longest run: 5km
Total lifts: 8
Snowboard parks: 1
Total crosscountry: 20km
→ www.skisolitude.com

7 THE CANYONS

The Canyons has evolved from 'pretty much nowhere' in 1997 into a world-class destination resort in less time than Will Smith's kids have started taking over the world.

THE MOUNTAIN

The Canyons rapidly expanding terrain is best for progressive riders and better. However, beginners have the High Meadows learning area - 25 acres of trails designed for new starters with a mix of slopes and open runs. And, unlike many North American resorts, this learning terrain is located up the mountain.

Intermediates will find that 44% of the trails are graded 'more

difficult' with plenty of fast fun cruising down through the forest. Experts were blessed when Ninety-Nine 90 peak became lift served with spectacular views of Utah's Summit county and a reputation for knee deep powder on wide open slopes with 360 degree access to the downhill.

The mountain's peak is one of the few sectors above the treeline and, if you like tree skiing, then for thinly gladed terrain try The Pines on the north side of Saddleback. For steep and deep, the north side trees off Tombstone are the best option. Don't miss the chutes on the south side of Murdock Peak, with the excellent powder slopes above accessible with a just short hike. The Canyons' trail map includes the location of more than half a dozen natural half pipes, at least, including one in the double black diamond terrain below Murdock

You'll find chutes and powder fields everywhere across The Canyons



There's powder everywhere you look in Utah: 500 lovely, average, annual inches of the stuff

Peak and then another in the gladed terrain of Escape Woods.

APRÈS

Most people opt to head for Park City when the lifts close. Here there are some 20 or so bars and clubs to enjoy if you don't want to make a night of it in one of the restaurants. Favourites include Italian Ciserio's Ristorante and Night Club and aforementioned Mulligan's Irish Pub.

HOW TO GET THERE

The Canyons is 30 miles from the airport via Interstate 80 and highway 224. The resort is quickly linked to the airport by a regular shuttle bus.

THE CANYONS IN NUMBERS

Bottom lift: 2073m
Top lift: 3044m
Vertical drop: 977m
Total number of runs: 146
Blue runs: 14%
Red runs: 44%
Black runs: 42%
Longest run: 4km
Total lifts: 17
Snowboard parks: 3
Halfpipes: 7
→ www.thecanyons.com

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